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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 04 MUMBAI 001253

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SUBJECT: HOW SOUTHERN CHHATTISGARH BECAME INDIA'S HUB OF NAXALITE VIOLENCE

REF: A) MUMBAI 358, B) MUMBAI 1119

CLASSIFIED BY: Michael Owen, Consul General, Consulate, Mumbai, State Department.

REASON: 1.4 (b), (d)

#### Summary

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¶1. (C) Southern Chhattisgarh has become the epicenter of Naxalite violence in India, with 214 insurgent-related casualties to date in 2006 and every indication that numbers will continue to rise. There are several causes for this escalating crisis. After the state was established in late 2000, the Government of Chhattisgarh (GOC) has attempted to establish control over and develop Naxalite-administered territory in the southernmost Kanker, Bastar and Dantewara districts. This has prompted insurgent attacks and compelled the GOC to militarize its police force and double it in size. At the same time, Naxalites from Andhra Pradesh reportedly shifted significant operational capacity to southern Chhattisgarh during and after the 2004-05 failed peace talks in AP. Finally, a counter-insurgency movement, "Salwa Judum," began in June 2005 among the region's tribal population, which has resulted in violent civil conflict among the people of Dantewara district and record numbers of civilian deaths. Our contacts recommend public-private partnerships as the best method for bringing peace and development to southern Chhattisgarh, while noting that corporate giants Essar, the National Mineral Development Corporation, and Tata all intend to build steel plants in Dantewara. End summary.

#### 2006 Casualties

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¶2. (SBU) In February 2006, Prime Minister Manmohan Singh described Naxalites as "the single biggest internal security challenge ever faced by [India]." Currently, India's most severe Maoist insurgent challenge is in southern Chhattisgarh. According to the South Asia Intelligence Review (SAIR) there have been 214 Naxal-related casualties in 2006 through June 27 in Chhattisgarh, almost all of which occurred in the southernmost districts of Kanker, Bastar and Dantewara.

Official state police statistics are not yet available for this period but our sources in the department confirmed these numbers. The reported deaths include 45 police, 50 insurgents and 119 civilians. The next closest Indian state by comparison is Andhra Pradesh, which, according to SAIR, experienced 63 fatalities over the same period.

#### Creation of a New State and the Origins of Conflict

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13. (SBU) Until achieving statehood in 2000, Chhattisgarh was the most neglected part of Madhya Pradesh, itself one of the more underdeveloped states in India, EconOff heard at a conference on Naxalism hosted by Mumbai's Nehru Centre on June 123. Even within Chhattisgarh, the state's southern third is considered a backwater. As described in ref A, the sparsely populated Kanker, Bastar and Dantewara districts in southern Chhattisgarh are hilly and heavily forested. "Scheduled Tribes" as a percentage of the total population in this region increase as one travels south, from 56 percent in Kanker, to 67 percent in Bastar, to 79 percent in Dantewara. Scheduled Tribes are at the bottom of India's social-caste structure, and in southern Chhattisgarh they continue to live in primitive farming and hunter-gatherer communities deep within the forest. Exercise of government authority and provision of state services in these wilderness areas has been largely absent. The Abujhmar (or "Unknown Land") region of west Bastar, for instance, is only now being surveyed for the first time, and that by remote sensing, according to civil society activist and journalist B.G. Verghese.

14. (SBU) The few state officials posted to southern Chhattisgarh were frequently accused of misconduct by villagers

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there, according to former intelligence officer Anjaneya Reddy. By the mid-1980s, Naxalites from Andhra Pradesh gained a foothold in the area by offering to protect tribal communities from abusive police, forest officials, timber mafia and money-lenders. In return, Naxalites forcibly recruited one child from each local family, and "taxed" local farmers, contractors and traders at 12 percent. The then state government in Bhopal had generally abdicated its rights and obligations in the area, and the Naxalites increased in size and influence without facing much resistance. Annual levels of insurgent-related deaths in Chhattisgarh were typically in the single digits.

15. (C) This all began to change when Chhattisgarh became a state in 2000. Abdication was abandoned in favor of extending government control and promoting development, which inevitably brought the state into direct confrontation with the insurgents, Verghese concludes. (Comment: Whatever past expediciencies local politicians may have traded with area Naxalites surely must have paled in value to developing India's most mineral rich state from the government's newly won seat of power in Raipur. End comment.) The GOC, accordingly, has doubled the size of the state police force and is giving every officer a six-week paramilitary training program at the Counter-Terrorism and Jungle Warfare Training Center in Kanker (CTJWTC - ref B). Naxalites, in turn, have increased attacks against police and banned most new development initiatives, especially roads, bridges, and schools. Preventing connectivity to the outside world, administrative penetration, and educational empowerment are fundamental to preserving power from the insurgents' perspective, several conference participants argued. Naxalite tactics include election fraud, threats, infiltration and misinformation. They divert local resources from state and private development projects and subsequently attack respective administration offices to destroy evidence of their wrongdoing. The director and staff of Catholic Relief Services (CRS) in Chhattisgarh report that many NGO projects in southern Chhattisgarh are now closed due to Naxalite pressure. The NGO

community's inability to provide disaster assistance to Dantewara district's growing IDP camps - also due to fear of Naxalite retribution - is another result of this tactic, which will be further detailed septel.

#### Naxalite Profile in Southern Chhattisgarh

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¶6. (C) Today, the Naxalite insurgents operating in southern Chhattisgarh are the former People's War (PW) element of the recently created CPI (Maoist) organization and led by Telagu speakers from Andhra Pradesh, with Chhattisgarhi tribal people filling out the preponderance of rank-and-file membership. An estimated 3,000-4,500 Naxalite troops are based in southern Chhattisgarh, usually in bands of 30-40 fighters, according to Director General of Police Rathode. Brigadier General (ret.) B.K. Ponwar, Special Inspector General of Police and Director of the CTJWTC told ConGenOffs that "Kosa" took over command after former Naxalite state commander "Sanyal" was captured this March. Like his predecessor, Kosa is from Andhra Pradesh. Shailesh Pathak, Secretary to the Governor of Chhattisgarh, earlier told us that the state's insurgency problem escalated during and after the failed October 15, 2004 - April 4, 2005 peace talks in neighboring Andhra Pradesh, as the insurgents used the ceasefire period to consolidate greater operational capacity in southern Chhattisgarh.

¶7. (C) Chhattisgarh's insurgency problem increases as one travels south. In May 2006, ConGenOffs rode with police escort from the state capitol Raipur to the CTJWTC in central Kanker district (ref B). Despite the heavily reported presence of Naxalite operatives existing throughout Kanker, daylight road traffic seemed normal. John Ash, a veteran expat resident and local tour operator, told us that travel is risky in Bastar and becomes consistently dangerous south of the Bhopalpatnam to Jagdalpur highway in Dantewara, an area where he refuses to take customers. Insurgents have not targeted tourists to date, and are not likely to do so in the near future, according to Ash and the police, but their frequent use of land mines and IEDs make

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travel in almost all of Dantewara wholly unsafe.

¶8. (C) West Bastar's Abhujmar area, which shares a hilly border with Maharashtra, is home to large pockets of insurgent fighters and is another no-go zone, Ash told us. Likewise, increasing violence in eastern Dantewara towards and into the town of Jagdalpur, which stems from attempts to link Dantewara- and Orissa-based Naxalite operations, makes travel there inadvisable. CRS staff in Chhattisgarh agreed with this assessment and added that significant insurgent encampments also exist in the Konta, Gangalore and Bijaput areas of Dantewara, on the state's southernmost border with Andhra Pradesh. Insurgents concentrate operations in state border areas so as to better flee between police jurisdictions, our police contacts told us.

#### The "Salwa Judum" Counter-Insurgency

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¶9. (C) India's only active anti-Naxalite, grassroots counter-insurgency is the "Salwa Judum" campaign in Dantewara district, which is primarily responsible for Chhattisgarh's escalating casualties among civilians. The origins of Salwa Judum as either a true people's uprising, or a GOC organized offensive was the matter of much debate at both the Naxalite conference in Mumbai and in the Indian press. Leftist elements within the UPA government in Delhi have publicly accused the BJP-led GOC of instigating the bloody counter-insurgency, and are demanding that the GOC put an end to Salwa Judum. However, Dantewara MLA Mahendra Karma, who also is leader of the Congress opposition in state parliament, told EconOff that his constituents began the movement on their own and then drafted

him as Salwa Judum's leader. Karma claims that he convinced the GOC to support Salwa Judum as a means of securing resources from Delhi. His account was confirmed by BJP insider Pathak. (Comment: Regardless of how it started, the counter-insurgency would appear difficult for the GOC to unilaterally end, even if it were so inclined, because GOC forces currently exert little control over the relevant actors in the movement or the district in general. End comment.)

¶10. (SBU) Droughts in 2004 and 2005, as Karma and Verghese tell the story, limited the harvest of wild tendu leaves that are the major source of cash income for southern Chhattisgarh's tribal people (tendu leaf is used locally to roll inexpensive cigarettes). To make up lost "tax" revenues, the Naxalites demanded that wholesale buyers pay twice as much for this product, which was rejected. The Naxalites then banned all tendu harvesting from April to May 2005. This deprived tribals of sales revenue and the customary annual government bonus they receive after the final market sale of the season.

¶11. (SBU) Resentment sparked tensions and on June 5, 2005, in Ambeli village, Dantewara, eight Naxalites were beaten and apprehended by supporters of Mahendra Karma. Naxalites retaliated by killing eight innocent villagers in nearby Kotrapal village. What followed next is unclear, according to our contacts. Fighting, abductions, torture, reprisal killings and burned villages, in any event, have created deep divisions among the tribal people, over 50,000 of whom fled or were forcibly brought to roadside IDP camps. (Comment: The ferocity of the Naxalite's response is not without precedent. They killed 70 tribal people to quash a 1992-93 rebellion in the region. End comment.)

¶12. (C) Today, Salwa Judum has approximately 5,000 members. Of these somewhere between 2,500-3,000 have been made Special Police Officers. They receive 1,500 rupees a month salary (roughly \$35) and rudimentary training and are placed alongside CRPF and other paramilitary units to provide camp security and to operate road-blocks and checkpoints. Some have received guns, but many use bows and arrows. They are an "aggressive, out-of-control rabble," according to Verghese, who visited Dantewara in March 2006 to inspect IDP camps and interview Salwa Judum members. Verghese accuses Salwa Judum of atrocities similar to those committed by Naxalites, including in particular

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widespread burning of suspected Naxalite sympathizers' villages.

Comment: Suggested Solutions

¶13. (SBU) Conference participants recommended public-private partnerships to bring development to southern Chhattisgarh, noting that corporate giants Essar, the National Mineral Development Corporation, and Tata all intend to build steel plants in Dantewara. Local villagers should be given a place at the negotiating table and a greater role in governing and policing themselves, it was agreed. If the security situation improves enough to make such investment possible, then these recommendations have obvious merit, but given that it will also upset thousands of years of social order, bringing development to the area's Scheduled Tribes may have unpredictable challenges of its own. End comment.

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